

Unashamed (24): I've Never Been to Spain

(Romans 15:23-33)

I. Introduction

- A. We had an anniversary slip by two weeks ago and I totally missed it (*I do most years*)
1. I began work at Denbigh on May 16, 1980 supposedly in cushy job as youth minister
 - a. Shortly before we arrived, the preacher announced he was returning to Oklahoma
 - b. The elders asked me to fill in as the interim while they found a real preacher
 - c. So for 37 years I have been filling in while you've wait for a real preacher to show!
 2. **Old Story:** One eldership was notorious for firing their preacher each and every spirit
 - a. Their young preacher knew what was coming when elders called him for meeting
 - b. They gave a year extension! The next year the same! Then a lifetime contract!
 - c. He was flattered. He pointed to their history of firing preachers and asked why?
"We don't like preachers; we do want preacher. You're as close to no preacher as it gets!"
 3. Our master plan on leaving graduate school was really quite simple. **Get out now!**
 - a. I was on staff at a pretty large church that had become both toxic and intolerable
 - 1) **Plan #1:** Leave grad school and finish my master thesis later. Which I did.
 - 2) I was looking for a job the same time Denbigh was looking for youth minister
 - b. **Plan #2:** Spend 3 years learning under Lloyd, then move on to my own megachurch
 - 1) Then bam! I had 2 sermons, 2 classes and bulletin to mimeograph every week
 - 2) And that's what I've been doing for 37 years (*we did upgrade the mimeograph*)
 4. **Point:** Sometimes God's plans can turn out to be quite a bit different from our plans!
- B. Our 26-part series on Romans is winding down to end; all we have left is personal stuff
1. We could observe the holy Passover on rest of Romans (*just feel holy and pass over*)
 - a. Paul discusses his plans to visit Roman church— he's not going to visit Denbigh!
 - b. If Paul is coming, then we need to hurry and finish our bathroom renovation, right
 2. Frankly, I'm enjoying this Romans series too much just to do the pass-over.
 - a. And the Spirit decided to include this section; that's good enough, right?
 - b. I think there is a practical lesson here that I need and maybe you need as well
 3. Out text in **Romans 15:23-33** talks about Paul plans to visit Rome and then Spain
 - a. I've entitled it "*I've Never been to Spain.*" Every series needs one *3 Dog Night*
 - b. We'll see that Paul had detailed and meticulous plans for his immediate future.
 - c. But life, Satan and God constantly messed with Paul's plans. Same is true for us.

II. I've Never Been to Spain: Paul's Plans and God's Plans

- A. As Paul winds down his letter, he mentions wanting to come visit the church there.
1. First, he explains why he hasn't visited the church at Rome before then (**Rom 15:22**)
 - a. I don't know if you've noticed, but Paul is a city boy, at least in his ministry choices
 - 1) He spends the most time in Ephesus (3 years) and Corinth (a year and a half)
 - 2) He doesn't go to places like Colossae or Laodicea—too far off the beaten track
 - b. He goes to large, crossroads cities that will have impact on the most people possible
 2. Why hasn't he gone to Rome, the largest and most prominent crossroads cities?
 - a. He began by saying he wanted to go to Rome but was prevented (**Rom 1:13**)
 - b. He now tells them what prevented him—he had too much other work (**Rom 15:20**)
 - 1) Paul made the decision to be a church planter where gospel wasn't known all
 - 2) But now he decides that maybe it was time that he might visit Rome. Why?
- B. Did you do your daily reading? There's an interesting overlap in Wednesday's reading
1. In **Acts 19**, Paul is in the middle of a very productive ministry in city of Ephesus
 - a. Paul is used to being run out of town, but things are rocking and rolling here
 - 1) Miracles are being performed. People are believing in the name of Jesus
 - 2) So many turn from the dark arts they publicly burn their incantation books
 - b. Then there's the seven sons of Sceva who try to cast out demons like Paul
 - 1) The demon says, "*Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?*"
 - 2) He beats the stuffing out of these seven clowns, while Paul tries to look pious!
 2. Paul is having great success in Ephesus; Luke sums it up like this (**Acts 19:20**)
 - a. So what does Paul do? He decides to leave and return to Jerusalem (**19:21-22**)
 - b. Not only will he go to Jerusalem, but he makes his plans now to go to Rome
 - 1) He's will swing through Macedonia (Philippi) and Achaia (Corinth) first
 - 2) The reason for that is business. We'll take a look at that in just a second.
- C. Back to **Romans 15**. Paul tells the church at Rome what his plans are (**15:23-24**)
1. He still doesn't want to plow in someone else's field, so he's off to work in Spain
 - a. Like *Three Dog Night*, he's never been to Spain... and neither had anyone else!
 - 1) See his not-so-subtle implication, "*have you assist me on my journey there.*"
 - 2) Like any missionary, Paul has to spend some of his time raising his support!
 - b. His plans now are the same ones in **Acts 19**, "*The time has come to go to Rome!*"

2. In **Acts 19**, Paul said that planned to go to through Macedonia and Achaia
 - a. As he writes in **Romans 15**, he has not made it back to Jerusalem (**Rom 15:25**)
 - b. It does appear that Paul has already been to Corinth and Philippi (**Rom 15:26**)
 - 1) You know that passage we read in 1 Cor 16, “*Now concerning the collection*”
 - 2) That line, “*that there be no gatherings when I come*” (**16:2** KJV) Well, he came!
 - c. This contribution for famine relief in Jerusalem among Gentile churches was critical
 - 1) This is more than just doing good to all, especial family of believers (**Gal 6:10**)
 - 2) For Paul, it’s an expression of solidarity between Jew and Gentile (**Rom 15:27**)
 - d. Paul was going to personally accompany these gifts to Jerusalem (**Rom 15:28**)
 - 1) He had not make that trip, but as soon as he did he was heading for Rome
 - 2) Paul’s plans are finally set. Go to Jerusalem, on to Rome, and then on to Spain
 - e. No passing “Go” or collecting “\$200.” What could possibly go wrong with that?
- D. Yiddish proverb is as true for apostles as it is for us, “*Man plans and God laughs*”
 1. In fact, God told Paul his original plans were all wet! (**Acts 20:22-23, 21:10-11**)
 - a. Paul’s plans for Rome seem dim. He is still singing, “*I’ve never been to Spain*”
 - b. God doesn’t say abort the plans; he just lets him know there will be adjustment
 - c. It’s hard to threaten someone who can say, “*To live is Christ, to die is gain*”
 2. Paul did finally make it to Rome, though not exactly according to his master plan.
 - a. Paul was arrested soon after he arrived in Jerusalem, almost torn apart by mob
 - b. To keep him from being murdered in his sleep, he was transferred to Caesarea
 - c. After 2 years in prison (*longest in any place except Ephesus*), appeals to Caesar
 - d. He is interviewed by King Agrippa, who would release him, except for appeal
 - e. His ship sails too late; he is shipwrecked, snake-bit, seen as murderer and a god
 - 1) Gets to Rome a bit bedraggled, but the church threw a parade! (**Acts 28:15**)
 - 2) Acts ends with Paul under house arrest for two years, freely preaching Jesus
 3. This isn’t exactly how Paul had things planned out in **Acts 19** and **Romans 15**
 - a. He had a logical, well thought-out plan all written neatly in his Day-Timer
 - 1) But LIFE hadn’t read his Day-Timer; or maybe SATAN had read Day-Timer
 - 2) But more anyone Paul understood that Paul wasn’t in charge of Paul’s plans
 - b. As Paul taught in Rome from his rented house, did he marvel how it all worked out?

III. I've Never Been to Spain: Our Plans and God's Plans

- A. There's nothing particularly pious about flying by the seat of your pants all the time
1. Sure, OK to be spontaneous and spur-of-the-moment...as long as you plan it out!
 - a. OK, I'm not the most highly organized person (*not exactly classified information*)
 - b. But I think it's always good to go into most any situation with a plan. Or two.
 2. A lack of planning almost always wastes time and opportunities and resources
 - a. If you have a meeting and there's no plan? Talk in circles and waste time
 - b. Start a project without a plan? Waste more time and money unbuilding...
 - c. Same is true for other areas of our life; Paul had a plan about coming to Rome
 3. We need a plan. The problem is what happens when our plan falls apart. *They will!*
 - a. Mike Tyson's line, "*Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth*"
 - b. Life has a way of punching us in the mouth, despite our very best plans
 - c. Faith is what happens after we get punched in the mouth by life!
- B. Go ahead and make your plans for the future; that's only being a good steward of time
1. Just give up the fiction that our plans have anything to do with the future. That's God!
 - a. What happens in the future may look nothing like your careful plans (**Prov 16:9**)
 - b. God plans will always win out, even if they feel like punch in mouth (**Prov 19:21**)
 - c. Make plans, but make sure that God is always at the center of them (**Jam 4:13-15**)
 - d. We'd do well to listen to only wise words ever said by King Ahab (**1 Kings 20:11**)
 - e. Don't focus to intently on your own plan—God's plan is right! (**Prov 16:1**, NLT)
 2. We can't always see what God is doing in the middle of our messed-up plans
 - a. When we get through the mess, sometimes we can look back and see his plan
 - 1) But when we're in the middle of the mess, we can't make any sense of it
 - 2) It doesn't feel like any plan. Faith is what happen when punched in mouth!
 - b. What did Paul do in his mess? Wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon
 - c. He kept on doing all that he could do and trust God to take care of everything.
- C. Muratorian Canon is list of books dating back to 170; contains interesting note on Acts
- 'Luke puts it shortly to the most excellent Theophilus that several things were done in his own presence, as he also plainly shows by leaving out the passion of Peter and also the departure of Paul from town on his journey to Spain*
1. Did Paul get out of prison and make it to Spain? Tradition (this and others) say yes.
 2. I'd like to think he did; it just makes a good story. He did make his final destination